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## ABSTRACT

A questionnaire responded to by 424 students was intended to find out the ways in which the needs and experiences of 19,000 lifelong learners enrolled in the Lifelong Learning Society (LLS) at Florida Atlantic University (FAU) meshed with the goals of the LLS. Of those students, 44 participated in a follow-up interview. These were the goals of the LLS: (1) develop new learning programs to meet identified needs of learners; (2) assist all society members to become continuous learners; and, (3) maintain high standards of educational practice. Questionnaire results indicated the following: (1) females outnumbered males two to one; (2) 58% were over age 70; (3) over 66% held bachelor's degrees; and (4) about 30% had been taking LLS courses for more than 3 years. Class interests focused on the social sciences (55%) and the arts (53%). The majority (88%) indicated they participated in the LLS because they loved learning. Interview responses generated these three themes that described LLS participation: (1) personal enrichment (expanding or gaining knowledge, intellectual stimulation); (2) social aspects of learning (forming a community of learners, relating to instructors); and, (3) institutional/logistical aspects (building facilities, administrative processes, course variety and scheduling). Recommendations for replication of FAU's program include the following: (1) a horizontal organization; (2) hiring personable instructors; and (3) expansion of the study to include administration. (Contains 5 tables and 24 references.) (AJ)

**NEW WAYS TO MEET NEW NEEDS: FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE  
THE SUCCESS OF A LIFELONG LEARNING CENTER**

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## New Ways to Meet New Needs:

### Factors that Influence the Success of a Lifelong Learning Center

#### **Introduction**

Among adult learners, older people have participated in instructional activities for as long as educational programs have existed. Learning throughout life is not a novel concept. The terms “lifelong education” and “lifelong learning” have been in existence for nearly a century. More than eighty years ago, the British Ministry of Reconstruction (1919) concluded:

Adult education must not be regarded as a luxury for a few exceptional persons here and there, nor as a thing which concerns only a short span of early manhood, but that adult education is a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and lifelong. (p. 55)

Lindeman, as cited in Stewart (1987), built upon his own extensive expertise to offer an intellectual basis for education as a continuing aspect of everyday life. He posited that education equates to life itself, not to preparing for life. Lindeman further contended that adult education is grounded in non-vocational rather than vocational pursuits. He asserted that curriculum developed for adult learners should focus on their interests rather than academic areas. In introducing the concept of androgogy, Lindeman suggested that adult learners’ experiences are the most valuable elements of their continuing education.

Tight (1996) expanded Lindeman’s perspective when he identified three features of lifelong learning:

First, lifelong education is seen as building upon and affecting all existing educational providers, including both schools and institutions of higher education...

Second, it extends beyond the formal educational providers to encompass all agencies, groups and individuals involved in any kind of learning activity...

Third, it rests on the belief that individuals are, or can become, self-directing, and that they will see the value in engaging in lifelong education. (p. 36)

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which the needs and experiences of approximately 19,000 lifelong learners are successfully meshed with the goals of the Lifelong Learning Society (LLS) and with the goals of Florida Atlantic University (FAU). This study provides a structure to analyze the experiences of one lifelong learning center in the higher education landscape. The process model emerging from this study intends to illustrate the relationships among the learners, the dynamics of the LLS program, and the wider university system. In addition, the model may be replicable at other institutions of higher education with the assumption that elements of its structure and content may differ.

### **Literature Related to the Study**

Peterson (1979) viewed “lifelong learning” as a conceptual framework for conceiving, planning, implementing, and coordinating activities designed to facilitate learning across the life

span. His contribution moved lifelong learning theory toward a professional field of practice.

Peterson's conceptual framework included seven goals for the establishment of lifelong learning in a formal educational setting. These goals were:

- (1) Develop new kinds of learning programs to meet identified needs of learners,
- (2) Assist all adults to function in society,
- (3) Assist all individuals to become continuous learners,
- (4) Develop diverse learning programs to attract and serve people with various backgrounds,
- (5) Involve non-school organizations in providing educational services,
- (6) Include other service organizations in planning and implementing programs, and
- (7) Maintain high standards of educational practice in all programs.

The LLS at FAU reflects three of Peterson's seven items. The LLS is committed to developing new kinds of learning programs to meet identified needs of learners; it is committed to assisting all individuals who join the society to become continuous learners; and it is committed to maintaining high standards of educational practice in all of its programs.

As early as 1970, Malcolm Knowles noted that creating comprehension of and participation in lifelong learning programs could involve the community in serious reflection of the institution's needs and goals. This association extends the institution's base of support and makes the public more aware of its mission. Knowles (1970) described the challenges facing adult educators and revived the concept of androgogy, building a conceptual framework for the development and design of educational programs for adults. Subsequently, Knox (1986) introduced guidelines for professional practice in educational gerontology.

Regarding learners of retirement age, Knowles (1970) posited that the need to be praised for accomplishments may diminish due to comfort with oneself. At the same time, he cautioned that this shift is not the same as disengagement. Knowles suggested that that people with highly engaged life styles are likely to remain highly involved.

Only recently have higher education providers in the United States attempted to recruit older learners and design educational experiences for their exclusive use. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) called attention to the seventy million baby boomers that will become a substantial learning cohort between 2010 and 2029. Manheimer et al. (1995) indicated that, since the early 1980s, hundreds of new educational programs for retirement-aged people have been launched. Record numbers of retirees have registered for college and university-based programs. Stubblefield and Keane (1994) considered adult education formats to be new social phenomena that participants and providers pursue to attain specific goals. Institutions of higher education now join with religious institutions, libraries, senior centers, and assisted living facilities to provide lifelong learning for an expanding senior population.

Over the past century, lifelong learning has become a reality and educational institutions are well advised to think in terms of developing lifelong learning relationships with their students (Brophy, Craven & Fisher, 1998). In the United States, Peterson (1979) recognized that society has undergone tremendous changes relevant to lifelong learning. The new realities of an aging population, and the changes individuals were experiencing in their lives, kindled widespread recognition that a new perspective was needed for viewing the totality of education and learning. Thus, the concept of lifelong learning began to flourish in new directions.

Many definitions of lifelong learning have been put forth in the United States and abroad (Merriam, & Brockett 1977). Verduin, Jr., et al. (1984) summarized lifelong learning as follows:

Lifelong learning is a multifaceted, complex process that has evolved since the beginning of time and which has helped adults improve the quality of their lives, and, in many cases, helped improve the quality of an organization, institution, or agency in which adults function. Lifelong learning can occur in a variety of ways when adults gain new knowledge or skills for some use important to the adults themselves. (p. 3)

### **Conceptual Framework**

The twofold conceptual framework for this study combines both behavioral and organizational perspectives. In the behavioral arena, Baltes (1993) suggested that both biological and environmental factors determine human development across the life span. These two sets of behavioral factors are influenced by normative elements typically associated with, or widely experienced by, an age cohort and also by non-normative experiences unique to an individual. Normative and non-normative factors interact to produce developmental stages across the life span. Baltes further suggested that age-graded normative factors may gain significance as one grows older.

Magnusson and Torestad (1993) built on Baltes' hypotheses with a theoretical framework for studying individual development. They added the proposition that individuals function in the context of an integrated system, interacting with their environments. These interactions consist of an individual's mental, biological and behavioral elements, and their external contexts.

The second facet of the conceptual framework addresses the organizational environment in which learning occurs. Bolman and Deal (1997) introduced a four-frame model that offers a

powerful lens for examining organizations. They identified structural, human resources, political, and symbolic perspectives as simultaneous ways to focus on organizational life. Bolman and Deal's organizational perspectives, along with Baltes' (1993) and Magnusson and Torestad's (1993) foci on the individual, serve as linked filters for examining the findings.

### **Research Questions**

Three questions guided this study: 1. How do the LLS students describe themselves? 2. Which, if any, of these descriptors are the strongest predictors of persistent participation in the LLS? 3. How do the LLS students describe the LLS program?

### **Method**

This exploratory and descriptive study used a mixed design approach of survey and interview research methods. Exploratory studies are useful in gaining initial insights about a particular phenomenon when a new interest is being examined or when the subject itself is new or not yet studied (Babbie, 1990; Denzin, 1970). Generally, exploratory studies serve three purposes: (1) to increase the researcher's understanding of the topic, (2) to test the feasibility of pursuing a more detailed study, and (3) to pilot the use of research for a more comprehensive study (Babbie). This study sought to increase understanding of the LLS and to describe the phenomenon of university-based lifelong learning. Thus, the exploratory approach was selected. With increasing interest in lifelong learning, more detailed and comprehensive studies of the phenomenon may also be pursued.



## **Participants and Setting**

All participants were students at the LLS' Boca Raton campus. Total Boca Raton enrollment exceeds 19,000 students, of whom approximately 17,000 are regularly enrolled students and 2,000 are guest students. Four hundred and twenty-four students volunteered to complete the questionnaire, and 44 responded to the interview protocol.

Surveys were available for participants in the lobby of the LLS building. Two sessions per week were conducted during nine, nonconsecutive weeks, in 45-minute time periods. A total of 18 sessions were conducted. Volunteers completed the questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of class sessions. The survey schedule was arranged to accommodate the maximum variety of courses. All interviews were conducted in the lobby of the LLS building before or after classes, simultaneously with each of the survey sessions and at subsequent sessions.

## **Data Collection**

Development of the survey and interview instruments began in conversations with senior LLS administrators. Rea (1992) posits that preliminary discussions are a critical source of valuable information for research purposes. They provide enlightening firsthand information about the history and current conditions of the topic under investigation.

The instrumentation was developed in two parts. The first part consisted of a questionnaire for data collection. The questionnaire protocol asked 18 questions pertaining to the participants' educational background, personal characteristics, reasons for participation in the LLS, and other activities. The form was uncluttered and questions were printed in large font. In some instances the participants checked their responses, and in other cases they responded to open-ended questions.

The protocol for the second part of the instrumentation was a structured interview guide, consisting of 10 broad, open-ended questions. Participants were invited to provide their views about their levels of satisfaction with the LLS, expound on their reasons for participation, identify program success factors, and identify ways in which the program could be improved.

## **Data Analysis**

As noted above, this study asked three questions: 1. How do the LLS students describe themselves? 2. Which, if any, of these descriptors are the strongest predictors of persistent participation in the LLS? 3. How do the LLS students describe the LLS program?

Data analysis proceeded in three phases. First, the demographic data were reported descriptively to profile the participants. In the second phase, linear regression analysis was used to determine which, if any, of the descriptors correlate with persistent participation. When the researchers observed a significant difference between the response rate for one survey item and

that of the seventeen other survey items, factor analysis was added to explain this phenomenon. In the third phase of data analysis, interviewees' descriptions of the LLS program were reported.

This exploration used both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interview and descriptive) methods. Quantitative research measures give the impression that the measure is discrete rather than continuous (Kachigan, 1991). For example, the quantitative variable, "number of years of ongoing participation" can take on any value on a scale. When a significant correlation occurs between two presumably discrete variables, findings about their coincidence may be deduced for individuals beyond the sample.

A qualitative thematic strategy for data analysis was employed to organize and to make judgments about the meaning of the data, allowing major themes and sub-themes to emerge inductively from specific responses. Design, coding, and results may all serve as support structures for more detailed and comprehensive studies that may be pursued in the future.

## **Findings**

This section presents the findings for the three research questions.

### **How do the LLS students describe themselves?**

Females outnumber males nearly two to one. The largest age cohort (58%) was born in the 1920s. Twenty-five percent were born in the 1930s. The oldest was born in the 1890s and the youngest in the 1940s. Nearly three-quarters are married and 20 percent are widowed. Ninety-four percent are retired. Fifty-six percent of those responding to the question describe themselves as Jewish or Hebrew. Nearly half live in Boca Raton and about one-third live elsewhere in Palm Beach County.

More than two-thirds of the participants have a bachelor's degree and an additional one-fourth are high school graduates. Seventeen percent indicate that their parents have at least a bachelor's degree. Virtually all indicated that their children attended institutions of higher education. Twenty-two percent had children who attended Ivy League schools.

About thirty percent have been taking courses at the LLS for more than three years and twenty-three percent for the past two or three years. More than half took noncredit courses at another college or university and about one-third at a religious or other study center. Forty percent take two courses each year and 36 percent take three or more courses per year. Two percent volunteer at the LLS.

Fifty-five percent indicate that the social sciences are their primary educational interest. Thirty percent chose music, and 23 percent chose the visual arts. Eighty-eight percent report that they attend the LLS "for the love of learning." Sixty-six percent say they believe "use it or lose it also applies to the brain," and 65 percent state that they attend because they like the instructors. In addition, 17 percent of those surveyed say they attend for social contact and 11 percent because "it gets me out of the house."

The participants' primary hobbies are sports activities (48%), reading (39%), and cards and other games (29%). Learning, reading, and taking courses are their primary sources of enjoyment at 39%. Travel is the second strongest response at 22%. Socializing is a close third at 21%. Europe (59%) is the primary travel destination for this group of participants, with USA/Canada (52%) as a close second.

**Which, if any, of these descriptors are the strongest predictors of persistent participation in the LLS?**

To help explain why learners persistently attend LLS programs, regression analyses were conducted to determine whether any variables predict persistent participation. The question “How long have you been attending courses at the LLS?” was correlated with the other variables. When correlated with five possible reasons for attending the courses, only “I like the instructors” was significant at .003, with a beta weight of -.155.

“How long have you been attending courses at LLS?” was also correlated with “What are your favorite activities?” Among the 17 activities listed by the participants, three were significant. The most significant of these, at a level of .013 and a beta weight of .122, was “eating in restaurants.” Nearly as significant, at .014 and a beta weight of -.125, was “reading.” The third most significant was “participating in active sports” with a significance level of .033 and a beta weight of -.105. When the persistence question was correlated with demographic items, “parents’ level of education” proved significant at the .049 level, with a beta weight of -.113.

**An anomaly**

In reviewing the responses, one of the items, “If you identify with an ethnic group, what is that group?,” warranted further investigation. Meyerson (2002) and Winston, (2002) noted that its low response rate (38%) as compared to the higher response rate (90% or higher) for each of the other survey questions, raised the question of whether it was possible to determine why responses to this item were provided or withheld. Multiple regression analysis provided no significant findings as to which participants omitted this item. However, the value of 0.010 on Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity identified the factor analysis as significant.

Responses originally coded according to categories of ethnic self-identification (e.g., Armenian, Hispanic, Jewish) were recoded to reflect whether the item was or was not answered. Per Newton and Rudestam (1999), the newly created variable was coded 0 if the item was answered in any way, and 1 if the item was not answered. The new variable was then correlated with educational level, parents' educational level, type of higher education institution that participants' children attended, date of birth, marital status, and gender. Of these six demographic variables, three were retained because they had eigenvalues equal to one or higher and a shared communality of 0.60 or greater. Specifically, educated males accounted for 23 percent of the total variance, depression era children accounted for 20 percent, and unmarried people for 17 percent. In summary, respondents who were relatively highly educated males, relatively younger than other participants, and unmarried tended not to self-identify with an ethnic group.

### **How do the LLS students describe the program?**

In loosely structured interviews, 44 LLS students were each asked ten questions about the LLS program. Their responses generated three themes that describe why active, aging adults participate in the LLS. The first theme, Personal Enrichment, emerged in four aspects: expanding prior knowledge, gaining new knowledge, intellectual stimulation, and impact on students' lives. The second theme, Building Connections: the Social Aspects of Learning, included learning together, instructors' professionalism, forming relationships, and forming a community of learners. The third theme described Institutional and Logistical Aspects of the program in terms of the building and its facilities, administrative processes, the variety of courses offered, scheduling, and parking issues.

## **Personal enrichment**

*“This program has sent me in new directions; I read and listen more.”*

Respondents most often defined personal enrichment in terms of education. One perspective of educational enrichment included expanding prior knowledge, expanding horizons, or broadening knowledge. One interviewee described this as “broadening your experiences and improving the quality of your life with education.” More than three-quarters of the participants defined educational enrichment as gaining new ideas about old topics, or expanding prior knowledge about topics of interest. One respondent stated, “The program has increased my previous knowledge. I have a better understanding of what I knew little about before I took courses in the LLS program.” Another eagerly provided this concrete example: “Today, for instance, my instructor spoke about a book on Truman. I want to learn more and more. I want to go to the library and get this book.”

The opportunity to gain new knowledge was perceived as a strength of the program. Nearly half of the respondents indicated that the LLS provides them with new knowledge, and one third affirmed that this aspect of the program most affects their lives, offering them a better understanding of topics that they had been unable to explore in prior years. One interviewee explained this in a general way by stating, “This program has sent me in new directions; I read and listen more.” Others described this more specifically, as in, “The courses have made me more knowledgeable about current affairs,” and “I get more information on current affairs than I do reading local and national newspapers.” Others reported that they understand more about art and music, that their attitudes about life have changed, and that the program has opened their eyes and provided them with new way of thinking and living. One participant stated, “It gives me a richer background.” Others stated, “The program gives older people a chance to get an

education,” and “If you have a green mind, these courses let the you expand your areas of knowledge.”

One-fourth of the respondents reported that the LLS provides intellectual stimulation. They stated that this stimulation gives them purpose, provides them with the enjoyment of learning, and improves their lives. As one interviewee explained, “This is a program where seniors from the community can come and exercise their minds by learning.” Another noted, “It enriches people’s lives and gives them a spark of life. It keeps the minds of people busy and active.” One retired educator stated, “I wanted to do something fulfilling for me. I wanted to learn something of interest to me as an adult learner rather than as a college kid taking classes with others not as committed to learning.” Another participant said, “LLS has made me a more interesting person.” According to one respondent, “The courses in music, politics, opera, and art are the best. Some of the religious courses are great. So are the literature courses.” Other participants reported that they visit museums and attend other cultural events as a result of their affiliation with the LLS.

In concurring that the LLS has provided them with a place to continue their intellectual pursuits, interviewees acknowledged the impact of the LLS program on their lives. One-fourth of the respondents opined, “Students profit from a program like this.” In reporting that the program provides a valuable pursuit for them, they replied in ways that expressed that “It’s a better way to spend time, much better than watching TV, or playing golf or cards,” and “You can spend only so much time eating in restaurants, shopping, playing golf or cards.” This sentiment was also stated in a positive light: “It has given us a wonderful opportunity to do things and learn about fun things we enjoy. I really enjoy spending my time this way – getting my education, stimulating my mind, and discussing topics that I am really interested in. I love it.” Several



respondents stated that learning is probably the best way to spend their time. Another recurring opinion is reflected in the statement, “The learning keeps older people’s minds working and makes them feel younger and more alive.” Another respondent said, “This program is stimulating, educationally new, interesting, and refreshing.”

While one-quarter said that their lives had changed as a result of the program, another one-quarter said that their lives had not. These respondents said they had always sought education in one form or another. “My life hasn’t really changed, just continued.” Another student described “a continuation of learning, which is an ongoing process for me.” Yet another student said, “No, my life is as delicious as ever.”

### **Building Connections: the Social Aspects of Learning**

*“If someone were planning to move to South Florida and found the Lifelong Learning Society before deciding which county to live in, this program might attract the person to our community.”*

The second set of themes included learning together, instructors’ professionalism, forming relationships, and forming a local community of learners. Half of the respondents reported that the LLS program could best be described through the social aspects of learning together with other people. One respondent described the program as “Bringing people together. People that want to gain knowledge about what they don’t know or can’t remember.” One learner said, “It’s fun, interesting, and something to look forward to. I have met many other interesting people.” “The strengths would have to be the fact that it is available to people of my age group” illustrates the social aspect of learning with people of similar ages. One student spoke of the LLS as a learning community by stating, “The program brings people together to gain knowledge. This is a community of learners. I have met a lot of people interested in the things I

am interested in.” One respondent said, “I have met many new people, new friends, with whom I discuss things we learned in the LLS program. And I have an appreciation for Shakespeare I never really had before. I really find the LLS program to be a society unto itself.” Another said, “One of the strengths of the program is the association with above average intelligence. That is very important for me.”

Forty-one of the forty-four respondents favorably evaluated the instructors’ professionalism. The most direct and frequent comments were that the professors “were very professional,” “were knowledgeable,” and “presented stimulating lectures.” One specific response was that instructors “provided factual answers to complex questions.” The general consensus was that the instructors are knowledgeable, interesting, and passionate about teaching adults and about their subject areas. The participants reported the main strengths of the LLS program to be the instructors and the quality and professionalism of the program itself. One student reported, “In order to have a successful program like this, the courses and instructors must be of high quality.” One interviewee enthusiastically described how a history instructor presented the material by placing herself into the historical context. This participant lauded the remarkable talent for teaching, and stated that she very much looks forward to attending this instructor’s upcoming classes.

While nearly all the respondents were satisfied with the instructors, two were not pleased. One respondent called an instructor “terrible” for telling “raunchy” jokes to the class. The other participant described a specific situation: “One professor spoke too softly and was hard to hear,” then continued with a generalization. “Many members don’t hear well. The instructors don’t understand that they must speak up. The content and subject matter are good, but the delivery is not because they speak too quietly and can’t be heard.”

Several interviewees noted that some instructors were “better” than others. “I’ve had four different instructors. Two were not so great. One of the teachers was boring; it was not the subject. Two were very good in their presentation and the way they spoke.” Another said, “I have mixed feelings. Some are top rate and present wonderful lectures. One is a little esoteric and above it all. He is condescending and spoke down to students.” Another student with a comparable opinion stated, “The professors vary. We have had some wonderful experiences and we have had some disappointments. Some of the instructors really grow on you. They are very good.” Similarly, another respondent stated, “Some are really outstanding and others are not. I’ve had several instructors and there was only one that I was not particularly fond of.”

Students commented that new relationships formed at the LLS have made positive impacts on their lives. One student stated, “We have learned a great deal and we have met a lot of new friends here we socialize with. We discuss the topics learned in the courses. It really has improved our life here in South Florida. We believe it’s a great way to spend our time.” Another adult learner mentioned, “I think I do more now. I have met many friends here and we get together and socialize.” One respondent stated, “I moved here about a year ago and was in the swimming pool talking to some of the people that live in the same development I do. Many of them still want to learn. Many people I have met in the community have said they are members here.” The opportunity to connect with academics also pleased the participants. Some reported that they have corresponded with their instructors, and some communicate via email.

One-fourth of the respondents said that the LLS program has provided opportunities to develop a community of learners. One participant said, “This is an asset to this community. The number of attendees is proof of that. Almost everyone I know has taken at least one course, and most have taken more than one.” The interviewees reported that the LLS is recognized as a

place where people who have an interest in seeking out new knowledge can meet and learn. Thus, they view it as improving the quality of their community. Another said, “The program fills a need in this community. When you consider the large number of senior citizens in this area, and there are a lot of seniors here, it provides an outlet for them. It provides stimulation for seniors.” “It makes Boca Raton a more active community for seniors to live in.” “It has added to the fact that this is a very nice place to live!” Another student noted, “It enhances the reputation of the Boca Raton area. It makes this community more cultural and attracts people to live here. If someone were planning to move to South Florida and found the Lifelong Learning Society before deciding which county to live in, this program might attract the person to our community.” Similarly, another interviewee called the LLS “an incentive for us to visit and spend time in South Florida. We come here for the courses.” One-fourth of the respondents acknowledged the impact of the LLS on the larger community of elderly people. One participant stated, “It’s brought many people into the University that did not come here before.” Another student added, “It has opened new vistas of learning to a large number of senior citizens in the surrounding communities. LLS has educated an entire community.”

### **Institutional and Logistical Aspects**

*It’s imperative to accommodate the seniors. That is of utmost importance, because that is who enrolls in the LLS courses.”*

Several interviewees spoke highly of the building and its amenities, describing them as “beautiful and inviting.” They said that they like having a meeting place, and that the Barry and Florence Friedberg Building is “a nice place to learn.” The participants liked knowing that members of the LLS donated the building and its furnishings, audio-visual equipment, piano, landscaping and outdoor benches. One participant explained, “It’s imperative to accommodate

the seniors. That is of utmost importance, because that is who enrolls in the LLS courses.”

Another stated, “They have to cater to the older people, there is no doubt about that.” While one student expressed pleasure that “LLS has done well here by providing proper audio-visual equipment for senior citizens,” another suggested placing microphones in the auditorium so that students could hear one another’s questions.

Respondents noted the need to improve administrative processes to better accommodate the increasing number of students. Over half of the interviewees commented on the volume of students trying to enroll at the beginning of the first and second semesters, when courses were already filled to capacity. One student suggested, “The office staff could use some extra help.” Another commented, “I did not have problems in years past, but this year our advance registration form was lost.”

The availability of a range of courses was a strong attraction for the members of LLS. One-fourth of the respondents indicated that variety is a strength of the program. At least three interviewees volunteered that the “large variety of courses and subjects provides something for everyone.” Another respondent stated, “The diversification in the program is really great. There is something for everyone. Some are more intellectual and some are just a lot of fun, like the music and art courses.”

One-fourth of the interviewees indicated that a wider variety of courses would improve the LLS program. One student suggested, “LLS could offer different subjects and programs not offered before, and go back and revive some of the older courses not taught in a while.” Another asked for “more courses in all subject areas.” One-sixth of the respondents suggested that LLS administration seek more input from learners. “Send more of these questionnaires. Ask the

members what their interests are, then base the course curriculum on the information you receive,” suggested one participant.

Some respondents described scheduling problems with comments such as, “Courses that are scheduled in the early evening are not convenient for me; I have to be at home,” and “I cannot attend the evening courses because I am alone and can’t travel at night.” Another respondent suggested that the administration consider and accommodate older people’s needs when scheduling evening courses. In contrast, one learner remarked, “I work full-time and cannot attend courses during the day.”

Many of the interviewees stated, “The parking situation needs to be improved.” While one-quarter of the respondents described parking as a major inconvenience, they acknowledged that parking issues do not reflect on the LLS program itself. One adult learner stated, “Parking decals are too expensive. It is eighty dollars a year to park, and that is too much!” There was some concern that rising prices of parking at the University could cause a decrease in attendance if people with fixed incomes were not able to afford the fee. In related comments, other respondents suggested that the program might be improved if transportation were provided for “those who don’t get around very easily.”

When asked what changes might hypothetically harm the program, the respondents overwhelmingly replied that lowering the quality of instruction, perceived by one fourth of the respondents as possibly resulting from inability to meet operating expenses, would be the most serious scenario. Others replied that the program could be harmed if the variety of courses were limited, or if schedules became inconvenient. “If they don’t cater to the needs of the elderly, which they do, it would hurt the program.” “Money issues could hurt this program. If people can’t afford it, they won’t come. LLS could price themselves right out of the market.”

The responses suggested that participants understand that excellent instructors lead to high enrollment, and enrollment drives income, which then enables the LLS to hire these instructors. Overall, the respondents stated that the major strengths of the LLS program are “the instructors, the wide variety of courses, and everyone associated with the center.” Many of the respondents felt that there were no weaknesses in the LLS program. Several stated, “I can’t think of any at all,” or “There aren’t any.”

### **Discussion**

The findings reflect the conceptual frameworks of Baltes’ (1993) and Magnusson and Torestad’s (1993) writings on normative and non-normative development and of the ways individuals interact with their environments. While interview and survey data reveal that students exhibit normative and non-normative behaviors that are conducive to the continuation of learning, the responses tend to demonstrate more normative than non-normative patterns. The participants, their parents, and their children are well educated. LLS students are accustomed to pursuing and investing in educational activities. Thus, participation in the LLS is normative behavior for this population. While they expressed shared interests in socializing, reading, and active lifestyles, they also described many individualized interests, ranging from pet care to music and from card games to sex. Participants indicated that developing relationships with new LLS friends and fostering social activities are important to them. They emphasized that LLS provides a social outlet and an environment for satisfying their intellectual curiosity by encouraging them to engage in learning. As a group, the participants return year after year because they like the instructors. These findings corroborate Knowles’ (1970) theory that people with highly engaged life styles will remain highly involved.

The interview responses also illustrate the relevant components of Bolman and Deal's (1997) four frames: the structural, human resources, symbolic, and political aspects of an organization. The participants expressed minimal concern with, and but seem to appreciate, the organization's administrative and political structures. They are aware of the workload and responsibilities of administrators and volunteers. With the notable exceptions of parking and registration, they are satisfied with the ways in which administrative processes are conducted.

The building reflects the organization's emphasis on human resources and acknowledgment of learners' needs. LLS administrators anticipated these needs and included accessible ramps, excellent lighting, wide aisles, comfortable chairs, state-of-the-art audio and video equipment, and conveniently located and appointed rest rooms, to accommodate the elderly population. Interviewees emphasized that the building enables program success. The human resources frame is also reflected in survey responses indicating the correlation between continued attendance and liking the instructors, and in interview responses which support this finding.

The symbolic frame comes into focus when one approaches the Florence and Barry Friedberg Lifelong Learning Center. Interviewees indicated that the building is inviting and comfortable, and that they feel that it belongs to them. The LLS members paid for this million dollar facility and donated each item in the building. Wall plaques name the donors and identify their gifts. The generosity reflects their love of learning and their desire to literally build a learning community.



## Conclusions

The findings of this study answer the three research questions and suggest that common ground exists upon which the needs and experiences of lifelong learners can be successfully meshed with the goals of the LLS and the goals of the wider university. Two major conclusions are reached in this study.

First is the development of a five-constituent process model. The constituencies consist of the learners, the LLS' elected Advisory Board, LLS administrators, the Dean of Continuing Education, and the University administrators at the vice presidential and presidential levels. Within the University, the LLS is a uniquely horizontal organization wherein ideas and information flow consistently throughout the program and the university system. Learners, both individually and represented by their elected Advisory Board, inform LLS Administrators about their concerns, needs, and preferences regarding all aspects of the program, thus driving procedural decisions. Simultaneously, the Dean of Continuing Education informs the LLS administrators of University policies as they pertain to the organization and the wider system. Thus, the Dean serves as a liaison between LLS administrators and University administrators regarding policy issues.

The second and related conclusion is the avoidance of a possible gap between learners and program administrators. The LLS is a democratic, dynamic, and open organization that welcomes input from learners about the overall functioning of the program. Each of the constituencies appears to purposefully maintain open and proactive communication, and to consistently respond to the legitimate needs of all parties. This synergy appears to be successful at FAU's LLS.

## **Recommendations**

First, institutions of higher education that wish to successfully replicate the success of FAU's LLS program are advised to distinguish between form and content. The LLS structure – democratic, open, and dynamic – promotes innovative learning programs in general. In contrast, specific operating decisions such as course content and aesthetics are likely to vary among institutions.

Second, and equally important, is hiring faculty that pleases the learners. Meyerson (1996) points out that mature learners will often expect “enthusiastic, creative and provocative teaching” and that the instructor’s mastery of subject matter often “not sufficient to get the job accomplished.” (p. 1)

Third, as the proportion of traditional students decreases at some institutions of higher education, new models for program administration are in order. Successful programs such as the LLS may provide insights for emerging needs across the university.

Fourth is the recommendation to expand this study to include additional information. The perspectives of recently elected and former members of the Advisory Board, the Associate Dean and Director, the Dean, the President, and the associated Vice Presidents, including the development officer would enrich the model and its elements. That study is now in progress.

## **Summary**

Lifelong learning is, indeed, a continuous process whereby individuals select and engage in educational activities across their life spans. This study reveals that FAU's LLS participants are active, sociable, intelligent people, primarily between the ages of 65 and 85. They consider themselves and their endeavors interesting. They enjoy each other's company in a variety of

settings and are willing to establish new relationships. They persist in taking courses when they like the instructors. Thus, the hiring of instructors is one crucial element of this program's success.

The confluence of procedure and policy at the most local administrative level is another key reason for program success. Learners demonstrate that they are able to provide their own facilities and that they are willing to invest precious time and retirement income in pursuit of learning. This unique and successful lifelong learning program may provide a template for creating new 21<sup>st</sup> century processes. New ways of designing, developing, and delivering programs may, in turn, add value to the university as a partner as well as a provider in the learning community.

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**Table 1: General characteristics of LLS participants**

**Gender**

Females outnumber males nearly two-to-one; 64 percent (N=272) of the respondents are women, 43 percent (N=146) are men.

**Age**

The largest age cohort, comprising fifty-eight percent (N=244) of respondents, was born in the 1920s. About half as many, twenty-five percent (N=107) were born in the 1930s. The next largest group, thirteen percent (N=56), was born in the 1910s. Fewer than one percent of the respondents were born before 1910: two in the first decade of the twentieth century, and one in the 1890s. The youngest three percent of respondents (N=12) were born in the 1940s.

**Household**

Nearly three-quarters of the respondents, seventy-three percent (N=310), are married. Twenty percent (N=88) are widowed. Three percent (N=12) live with a roommate, and two percent (N=10) are divorced. Less than one percent (N=3) identify as single. One respondent added the category “domestic partner.”

**Work status**

Ninety-four percent (N=397) are retired, and five percent (N=21) work part time. The one respondent who self-identifies as working full time noted that she is a full-time homemaker, who cooks, sews and gardens.

**Ethnicity**

Fifty-six percent (N=256) wrote either Jewish or Hebrew in this category. One percent (N=6) wrote in Hispanic. In the “less than one percent” categories, three respondents wrote Russian, Armenian, or Greek Orthodox, and the same number wrote Caucasian. Two respondents wrote either Yankee or USA, and one wrote Protestant. Exactly thirty-eight percent did not reply to this question.

## **Location**

According to their zip codes, forty-three percent (N=184) live in Boca Raton, thirty-one percent (N=132) live north of Boca Raton in other areas of Palm Beach County, and twelve percent (N=52) live south of Boca Raton in adjacent Broward County. Five percent (N=23) gave out-of-area zip codes.

Within Boca Raton, twenty-two percent (N=92) of the total respondents live in central Boca, which is primarily comprised of country club communities. Twelve percent (N=50) live adjacent to or alongside the ocean. Ten percent (N=42) live in the western developments or in the older areas of town.

Most of the respondents from other Palm Beach County towns live within ten miles of the LLS building, and they comprise twenty-nine percent (N=126) of the respondents. One percent (N=6) lives between twenty and thirty miles from the center, in the Palm Beach area. These six participants are equidistant or closer to a newer branch of Florida Atlantic University's Jupiter, Florida campus, which houses another branch of the LLS.

Boca Raton is the southernmost town in Palm Beach County, adjacent to Broward County. Six percent of the total respondents (N=27) live in Deerfield Beach, Broward County's northernmost town and Boca Raton's neighbor. Four percent (N=17) live farther south, in central Broward County, and two percent (N=8) live in the Fort Lauderdale area. Out of area zip and postal codes range from Colorado to Ontario. They include Illinois, New Jersey and Massachusetts.



**Table 1: General Characteristics of LLS Participants**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	272	64.2
Male	146	34.4
Total reporting	418	98.6
No reply	6	1.4
<b>Decade of birth</b>		
1890s	1	.2
1900s	2	.5
1910s	56	13.2
1920s	244	57.5
1930s	107	25.2
1940s	12	2.8
Total reporting	422	99.5
No reply	2	.5
<b>Current household status</b>		
Married	310	73.1
Widowed	88	20.8
Roommate	12	2.8
Divorced	10	2.4
Single	3	.7
Domestic partner	1	.2
Total reporting	424	100.0
<b>Work status</b>		
Retired	397	93.6
Work part time	21	5.0
Work full time	1	.2
Total reporting	421	99.3
No reply	3	.7
<b>Ethnic self-identification</b>		
Jewish	248	58.5
Hispanic	6	1.4
Caucasian	3	.7
Russian; Armenian; Greek; Orthodox	3	.7
Yankee/ USA	2	.5
Protestant	1	.2
Total reporting	263	62.0
No reply	161	38.0

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Zip code</b>		
<b>East Boca – ocean</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>11.8</b>
<b>Central Boca – golf clubs</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>21.7</b>
<b>West &amp; City Boca</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>9.9</b>
<b>Palm Beach County – adjacent</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>29.3</b>
<b>Palm Beach County – north</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1.4</b>
<b>Broward County – adjacent</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>6.3</b>
<b>Broward County – central</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>4.0</b>
<b>Broward County – south</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1.9</b>
<b>Out of area</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>5.4</b>
<b>Total reporting</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>92.2</b>
<b>No reply</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>7.8</b>

**Table 2: Educational environment of LLS participants**

**Participants’ educational level**

More than two-thirds of the respondents, seventy-six percent (N=321), state that they have at least bachelors’ degrees. Of these, more than one-third of the respondents report having earned graduate degrees, eleven percent (N=48) with doctorates, and twenty-four percent (N=100) with master’s degrees. The remaining forty-one percent (N=173) state that they have bachelor’s degrees. Twenty-three percent (N=98) are high school graduates, and less than one percent (N=3) ended their formal education before completing high school. All but two respondents answered this question.

**Parents’ educational level**

Seventeen percent (N=70) state that their parents had at least bachelor’s degrees. Of these, eight percent (N=34) report that at least one parent had earned a graduate degree: five percent (N=21) of these were doctorates, and three percent (N=13) were master’s degrees. The remaining nine percent (N=36) had a parent with a bachelor’s degree. Parents of fifty-one percent (N=215) were high school graduates. Eight percent reported that their parents ended their formal education before completing high school. Twenty-five percent (N=106) did not reply to this question.

### Children's higher education

Twenty-two percent (N=95) of respondents state that their children attended Ivy League institutions. Of these, three percent (N=13) attended only Ivy League schools, and nineteen percent (N=82) attended a combination of Ivy League and other institutions. Sixty-four percent (N=271) of respondents report that their children attended private institutions of higher education other than the Ivy League. Of these, twenty percent (N=85) attended only private institutions, and forty-four percent (N=186) attended Ivy League or public institutions. Twenty-five percent (N=105) state that their children attended public institutions of higher education. Of these, sixteen percent (N=69) attended only public institutions, and nine percent attended Ivy League or private institutions. Eight percent (N=35) of respondents did not reply to this question. Two of these participants noted that they have no children.

**Table 2: Educational Environment of LLS Participants**

	Number	Percent
<b>Educational level</b>		
< High school	3	.7
High school	98	23.1
Bachelor's degree	173	40.8
Master's degree	100	23.6
Doctoral degree	48	11.3
Total reporting	424	99.5
No reply	2	.5
<b>Parents' educational level</b>		
< High school	33	7.8
High school	215	50.7
Bachelor's degree	36	8.5
Master's degree	13	3.1
Doctoral degree	21	5.0
Total reporting	318	75.0
No reply	106	25.0

	Number	Percent
<b>Children's higher education</b>		
Ivy	13	3.1
Other private	85	20.0
Public	69	16.3
Ivy & other private	46	10.8
Ivy & public	7	1.7
Other private & public	140	33.0
Ivy, other private, & public	29	6.8
Total reporting	389	91.7
No reply	35	8.3

**Table 3: LLS Members' recent educational activities**

**How long have you been taking courses at the LLS?**

Nearly two-thirds, sixty-three percent (N=266), have been taking courses at the LLS for more than three years. Twenty-three percent (N=99) have been taking courses for the past two or three years. Thirteen percent (N=56) reported that they had enrolled in their first LLS courses this year. Two respondents did not reply to this question.

**Have you taken non-credit courses elsewhere?**

Fifty-three percent (N=226) report having taken non-credit courses at another institution of higher education. Of these, thirty-two percent (N=136) took these courses only at another IHE. The remaining twenty-one percent (N=90) took these courses at another IHE and at some combination of other venues. Thirty percent (N=93) report having taken courses at a religious or other study center. Of these, just under eleven percent (N=45) took these courses only at religious or study centers. The remaining eleven percent (N=48) took these courses at religious or study centers and at some combination of other venues. Three percent (N=12) did not reply to this item.

**How many courses do you take each year?**

Forty percent (N=170) take two courses per year. Another thirty-six percent (N=152) report taking three or more courses per year. Of these, sixteen percent (N=67) take three, thirteen percent (N=53) take four, and eight percent (N=32) report taking five or more courses per year. Nineteen percent (N=79) take one course per year. Five percent (N=23) of respondents did not answer this item.

**Do you volunteer at the LLS?**

Ninety-seven percent (N=411) do not volunteer at the LLS, and two percent (N=10) do volunteer.

**Table 3: LLS Members' Recent Educational Activities**

	Number	Percent
<b>How long have you been taking courses at LLS?</b>		
First year	56	13.2
Second year	42	9.9
Third year	57	13.4
>Three years	266	62.7
Total reporting	422	99.5
No reply	2	.5
<b>Volunteer at LLS</b>		
No	411	96.9
Yes	10	2.4
Total reporting	422	99.5
No reply	2	.5
<b>Have you taken non-credit courses elsewhere?</b>		
Yes, at another college or university	136	32.1
Yes, at a religious or study center	45	10.6
Yes, at FAU & another IHE	42	9.9
Yes, elsewhere at FAU	24	5.7
Yes, at another IHE & a religious or study center	31	7.3
Yes, at FAU, another IHE, & a religious or study center	17	4.0
No courses elsewhere	117	27.6
Total reporting	412	97.2
No reply	12	2.8

	Number	Percent
<b>Number of courses per year</b>		
1	79	18.6
2	170	40.1
3	67	15.8
4	53	12.5
5+	32	7.5
<b>Total reporting</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>94.6</b>
<b>No reply</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>5.4</b>

**Table 4: Educational Interests**

**Areas of interest: first choice**

Fifty-five percent (N=235) of respondents selected the social sciences as their first choice. Their specific preferences include history, politics, psychology, economics, and sociology. Following that group, thirty percent (N=127) chose music, and twenty-three percent (N=99) chose the visual arts. In addition, eleven percent (N=17) selected theater or literature, and two percent (N=7) named science as their top educational interest.

**Areas of interest: other choices**

Thirty-four percent (N=142) selected music, and thirty-three percent (N=138) named visual arts among their other educational interests. Twenty-seven percent (N=114) state that the social sciences are additional areas of interest. Twenty-three percent (N=95) name personal growth as an additional area of interest. Three percent (N=12) named theater or literature, and three respondents say that science is another area of interest.

**Reasons for attending the LLS**

Eighty-eight percent of respondents (N=375) say that they attended “for the love of learning.” Sixty-six percent (N=278) say they believe that “use it or lose it also applies to the brain,” and sixty-five percent (N=276) attend because they like the instructors. In contrast,

seventeen percent (N=70) attend for the social contact, and eleven percent (N=47) because “it gets me out of the house.”

**Table 4: Educational Interests**

	Number	Percent
<b>Areas of interest: first choice</b>		
History & politics; psychology, economics, sociology	235	55.4
Music	127	30.0
Visual Arts	99	23.3
Personal growth	46	10.8
Theater & literature	17	4.0
Science	7	1.7
<b>Areas of interest: other choices</b>		
Music	142	33.5
Visual Arts	138	32.5
History & politics; psychology, economics, sociology	114	26.8
Personal growth	95	22.5
Theater & literature	12	2.7
Science	3	.7
<b>Reasons for attending LLS classes</b>		
Love of learning	375	88.4
I believe that “use it or lose it” also applies to the brain	278	65.5
Instructors	276	65.1
Social contact	70	16.5
It gets me out of the house	47	11.1

**Table 5: LLS Members' Activities**

**Hobbies**

Sports activities, reading, and cards and other board games are the participants' primary hobbies. Forty-eight percent (N=203) engage in sports, primarily golf. Thirty-nine percent (N=167) said that reading is one of their main hobbies. Twenty-five percent (N=104) named cards and other board games. Crafts, including gardening and cooking; cultural events, including theater and ballet; music, including enjoyment and performance; travel; volunteering; courses; and computers formed the second tier of hobbies. As many as eighteen percent and as few as eight percent of respondents identified each of these areas. Socializing is considered a hobby by five percent (N=20) of the respondents. In addition, writing, dining in restaurants, watching television, science, financial markets, and politics were each identified by about two percent of the respondents.

**Enjoyment**

Learning, reading, or taking courses led in this category, with a response rate of thirty-nine percent (N=164). Travel is the second strongest response, at twenty-two percent (N=94), and socializing is a close third, at twenty-one percent (N=90). The next group of activities that provides enjoyment to the respondents consists of family, sports activities, and cultural activities. Responses for these areas range from nineteen to sixteen percent, with numbers at 82, 73 and 58 respectively. Fourteen percent (N=58) state that they most enjoy being healthy or being alive. From eight to three percent, with numbers ranging from 34 to 12, name cards and games, relaxing, volunteering, crafts, and working as their most enjoyable activities. In addition, five name pet care, four cite sex, and three identify religious services among their most enjoyable activities.

**Where have you traveled in the past five years?**

Europe is the primary destination of this group, with USA/Canada a close second. Fifty-nine percent (N=252) traveled to Europe, and fifty-two percent (N=22) traveled within the USA or Canada. The next most frequent destination is to our neighbors to the south, with twenty-six percent (N=112) traveling to Latin American or the Caribbean. Asia and the Middle East are



next, with eighteen percent (N=74) and thirteen percent (N=55), respectively. Eight percent (N=33) traveled to Australia or areas of the Pacific Ocean. The same number traveled to Africa.

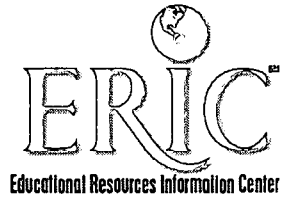
**Table 5: LLS Members' Activities**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Hobbies</b>		
Sports activities	203	47.9
Reading	167	39.4
Cards & other board games	104	24.5
Crafts, gardening, & cooking	75	17.7
Cultural events	62	14.6
Music	57	13.4
Travel	53	12.5
Volunteering	44	10.4
Courses	41	9.7
Computers	34	8.0
Socializing	20	4.7
Writing	10	2.4
Restaurants	9	2.1
TV	9	2.1
Science	8	1.9
Financial markets	7	1.7
Politics	2	.5
<b>What do you most enjoy doing at this time of your life?</b>		
Reading, courses, learning	164	38.7
Travel	94	22.2
Socializing	90	21.2
Family	82	19.3
Sports activities	73	17.2
Culture	67	15.8
Health, being alive	58	13.7
Cards & games	34	8.0
Relaxing	22	5.2
Volunteering	18	4.2
Crafts, gardening, cooking	19	4.5
Working	12	2.8
Pet care	5	1.2
Sex	4	.9
Religious services	3	.7

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>How often do you travel?</b>		
1x every 2 years	3	.7
1x per year	41	9.7
2x per year	45	10.6
3x per year	23	5.4
>3x per year	14	3.3
No reply	298	70.3
<b>Where have you traveled in the past 5 years?</b>		
USA, Canada	222	52.4
Europe	252	59.4
Latin America, Caribbean	112	26.4
Asia	74	17.5
Middle East	55	13.0
Australia, Pacific	33	7.8
Africa	33	7.8



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